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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8273
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000798

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP, IOL; AND PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: CHARGE MEETS WITH U WIN TIN

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) In an October 9 meeting, recently-released political prisoner Win Tin told Charge he hopes to use his freedom and reputation to inspire people to become more active in the pro-democracy movement and to reach out to opposition and ethnic groups outside the NLD. He acknowledged that his 19 years in prison were difficult - including periods when he was subject to abuse -- and the isolation has left him out of touch. He said he is reacquainting himself with his country, his party, and the issues they face. He stressed his priority is to work towards the release of all political prisoners and a genuine dialogue with the regime rather than focus on the regime's 2010 elections. When asked how he hopes to accomplish his goals, Win Tin demurred, saying he needs time first to readjust and discuss the issues with his colleagues before coming up with specific proposals. End Summary.

Admiration from all Americans

¶2. (C) On October 9, Charge, accompanied by Poloff, met with former political prisoner Win Tin at NLD headquarters in Rangoon. Charge conveyed to Win Tin the admiration and well wishes of all Americans, including the First Lady. He stressed that the United States stands committed to working for the release of all of Burma's political prisoners and a transition to a genuine democracy. He invited Win Tin to share his thoughts on how we can work with the Burmese people to help achieve this goal, both now and in the future.

Need for genuine dialogue

¶3. (C) Win Tin, who has re-assumed a position on the NLD Central Executive Committee, highlighted the importance of fostering a genuine dialogue among the regime, opposition elements, and ethnic groups. He told us that dialogue, rather than the 2010 elections, is a top priority. "I'm not thinking towards the 2010 elections," he said, because the hope is to establish a dialogue in which the elections, and most of Burma's other political and social issues, can be discussed. He made clear that the NLD's position on the

illegitimacy of the regime's "roadmap to democracy" is firm, but he also stressed that without dialogue, disagreements over the elections or the constitution likely will not be resolved. Win Tin acknowledged that some other opposition groups may be interested in participating in the 2010 elections, but he said he has not had the opportunity to speak with them yet.

Need release of all political prisoners, including ASSK

¶4. (C) Win Tin stated that genuine dialogue is not possible unless Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners are released. To this end, Win Tin spoke of his efforts to use his celebrity status to raise awareness of the plight of all political prisoners and to inspire people to become involved in the movement to free them.

No travel plans

¶5. (C) Win Tin fears that traveling beyond Rangoon would pose a risk to those with whom he meets, but said he will meet discretely with as many people as he can in Rangoon. He flatly ruled out any thought of travel outside of Burma, noting that he most likely would not receive a passport and, at least as likely, if he were to leave, the regime would not allow him to return.

Building links with other opposition elements

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¶6. (C) Charge noted Win Tin's recent public comments in which he offered to serve as a conduit between the NLD and other opposition and ethnic groups. Win Tin reiterated his desire to help the NLD reach out to these organizations as well as to those within the party who may disagree with its leadership. It is not important to agree on all of the large issues, Win Tin remarked, but it is important to build a strong working relationship among all interested parties. Win Tin told us that while he has not yet met with any other opposition groups, he has heard from some journalists that his comments were well received by some leaders of other opposition organizations.

Prison conditions difficult

¶7. (C) Win Tin lamented that his 19 years in prison were difficult and have left him "out of touch." He told us that since his release, he has been taking the time to reacquaint himself with his country, his party, and the issues they face. Win Tin described how, for most of the time he was incarcerated, authorities kept him in solitary confinement and denied him, a former journalist, the opportunity to read. Despite such restrictions, he recounted how, at various points in his sentence, he and other political prisoners were able to find ways to communicate and even smuggle newspapers, books, and a radio into prison. He also described instances of physical and mental abuse officials subjected him to in the early part of his imprisonment, including sleep deprivation, hooding, and physical assaults by his interrogators. But Win Tin said that worst of all, his time in prison was tedious and robbed him of the intellectual stimulation he craves.

Motive for release a mystery; but not spur of moment

¶8. (C) Win Tin said he could not speculate as to the motives behind his release and told us he is perplexed as to why officials let him go now. He did however point out that on five occasions over the past 19 years, officials offered him early release if he agreed to sign a pledge to avoid future

involvement with the NLD and politics. On each occasion he refused out of a sense of duty to the NLD and his country. He noted that around five months ago, prison officials moved him to a considerably larger cell, allowed him more access to reading materials, and began to allow him more opportunities to exercise.

Comment

¶9. (C) U Win Tin is a remarkable, courageous man. His commitment to the cause of freedom is inspiring. By his own admission, the 79 year old is not the energetic man he was 19 years ago, has a failing memory, and, at this stage at least, is not looking to lead the pro-democracy movement. But if, as planned, he can use the respect he has earned to begin to unite various democratic groups, he will go a long way towards ensuring a better future for his country. We will do what we can to help him. End Comment.

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